

NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY



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No. 479

NEW YORK, MARCH 3, 1906.

Price Five Cents

ABDUCTED IN BROAD DAY

OR NICK CARTER'S DUPLICATE PRISONER

by THE AUTHOR OF "NICK CARTER"



As Nick groped his way in the direction of the staircase, a sudden dash of some liquid struck him full in the face. He staggered about, his head awheel, his senses fast leaving him.



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Abducted in Broad Day;

OR,

Nick Carter's Duplicate Prisoner.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

A NEWSPAPER MAN IN TROUBLE.

One of the strangest murder cases Nick Carter ever handled came to him through his friendship for Harley Angell, a young newspaper writer with whom he had hunted and fished through two summer vacations.

He had known Harley intimately for a long time, and would have taken greater chances for him than he did take, if that were possible. He believed the young man to be worthy of the respect and esteem of any honest man, and incapable of the crime charged against him.

Therefore, if Brooklyn Bridge had taken wings some fine morning, and skimmed out over the bay, Nick could not have been more surprised than he was that afternoon in August when Harley Angell, looking pale and troubled, entered his private room, in company of a central station detective, and announced that he was under arrest for murder.

The whole thing seemed like a cheap joke to the great

detective at first, but it was evident that it was no joke so far as Harley was concerned. There were the sorrowful looks of the young reporter, and there was the central station detective, looking self-satisfied and offensively officious.

Nick glanced inquiringly at the central station man, who had coolly seated himself in Nick's favorite chair.

"What is it all about, Joe?" he asked.

Joe was pleased beyond all expression at having been sent to the private rooms of the great detective.

He smiled, and looked wise; then, proud as a peacock at being addressed directly by him, pointed to the prisoner with one hand, and lifted a black cigar from his lips with the other.

"I was told to bring him here," he said. "I don't know anything about the case. He seems to have a pull with the chief. Up-country murder, I believe."

"I will explain, with your permission," said Harley,

nodding in the direction of a little cloud of tobacco smoke which Joe was blowing about his fat face.

"Go on," said Nick, pointing to a chair, "and," he added, turning to Joe, "I'll be responsible for the prisoner, and bring him down when I have concluded my business with him. Tell the chief."

Joe looked disappointed. He had counted on being a party to the conference between Nick Carter and his client. But there was nothing to do but to take his departure. He understood that any other course would result in trouble for himself, as the word of the famous detective was good as gold with the chief of police of the city of New York.

He moved slowly toward the door, hoping to catch a word before he got out of earshot. He knew that it was a mysterious case—a murder case of great importance, and wanted just one word from Nick Carter to repeat to his associates at the central station waiting-rooms.

But that word he did not get. Nick remained silent until Joe was well out of the room, then he locked the door, and turned to grasp Angell by the hand.

"Now, tell me all about it, old man, from beginning to end," he said. "You understand how sorry I am to be your custodian in a case of this character, so we pass all that up, trusting that present conditions will not long exist. There was a murder?"

"Oh, yes; the man is dead enough."

"Who is dead?"

"Professor James Howard?"

"Not *the* Howard? Not the father of——"

"Yes, the father of Clara."

"Are you still engaged to the girl?"

"I was until yesterday."

"Until this thing happened?"

"Exactly."

"And now?"

"She has thrown me over until I can prove my innocence."

"Has the girl any special knowledge of the affair?"

"She knows just what every one at the resort knows, and nothing more."

"That's all right. A pretty girl with special knowledge, or that which she mistakes for special knowledge, of a crime in her head is a tough proposition, especially where she is troubled with a sense of duty."

In spite of the serious situation in which he found himself, Angell smiled.

"You are thinking of the Carventh case?" asked Nick.

"Yes," was the reply, "but, let me assure you, Clara has no guilty knowledge of this affair. In fact, no one has. I don't know how the professor came to his death any more than you do. That is, we all know what killed him, but no one save the murderer knows how it was brought about. It is a mighty strange affair."

"When did it occur?"

"Yesterday afternoon."

"Where?"

"At White Beach, a small summer resort up the Sound."

"And you were present when the murder took place?"

"Unfortunately. We were sitting on the piazza facing the stream, which is narrow and shallow, and flows within fifteen yards of the hotel. I was waiting for Clara to dress for a ride."

"Was there any one else on the piazza?"

"Not another soul. The professor and I were talking of his forthcoming book on the far East—you probably remember him as a globe-trotter, an author and lecturer of note—when he became very much excited at some suggestion of mine."

"Go on. Give us every detail. It may save time in the future."

"Is it possible that you have not read the morning newspapers? They are full of the murder."

"Proceed," said Nick quietly.

"Well, the professor was swinging his arms about in his fierce temper and talking in a loud tone, and I turned away to conceal a smile at his unnecessary emphasis."

"For an instant, he was out of your sight?"

"Entirely so, for I whirled my chair about, and sat more at his side. During that instant, a knife was buried in his heart. I heard a fall, and there he lay dead at my side. No one saw him fall. No one saw the fatal blow; No one was near but me. You see the boat it puts me in. The knife seems to have dropped out of the sky."

"The officers have the knife, I presume?"

"Certainly. They were prompt enough in their work. They have me, too, good and tight, and it looks like nasty business."

"We'll get you out of it, all right," said Nick encouragingly.

"I don't see how," was the discouraged reply. "I know that you can do it if any one can, Nick. That's why I coaxed and bribed the officer at White Beach to bring me to New York. That's why I bribed the door man at the central station to get me an interview with the chief of police. I had no sooner mentioned your name to the chief than out I came, with Joe as a sort of body-guard, you know."

"You'll see no more of Joe," said Nick.

"But the officer from White Beach is waiting for me at the central station, and I must go back and lie in that rotten village lockup to-night. It's better than the county jail, at any rate. What can be done in the way of bail?"

"Nothing," was the reply. "You can't get bail until you are arraigned, and you won't be arraigned until some one makes a complaint. I presume the local officer will do that."

"And the complaint will be for murder, pure and simple?"

"Undoubtedly. Why, man, look at the thing from the point of view of these officers. You were the only man on earth who could have reached the murdered man with a knife. No one could apparently have approached you two without having been seen. You see what we've got to fight."

"I guess I'm good for a seat in the electric chair," said Angell disconsolately. "How the dickens did that knife come in the man's heart? I can't account for it."

"Are there doors or windows near where you sat?"

"Nothing of the sort."

"No place from which an enemy might have stepped, the instant your back was turned?"

"No. We were near the end of the piazza, and there are no windows there. He could not have been reached from the end of the piazza, either, without the assailant being seen. It's a mystery, and may prove a serious one to me."

"Oh, never mind that, Angell. There must be a way out of it. I am sure there is, but we may as well face the truth. I want you to know the peril of the situation. That's why I called your attention to the thing from the official point of view. How many people were about there that day?"

"Fifty, I should think."

"Where were they?"

"On the narrow lawn in front of the piazza, and on the river in rowboats and canoes."

"I see; and no one saw the man killed?"

"No one even saw him fall. It was my outcry which attracted the attention of the crowd. I must have uttered a scream when I saw the man lying there in his own blood, though I do not recall having done so. At any rate, there was soon a crowd about us, and I was pinched there and then. I've been in custody ever since."

"Have you talked with any of the people who were out on the lawn and on the river in boats?"

"Oh, yes. The officer was very kind to me. I had my own way about things up there. Guess the people are afraid of the pencil I carry in my vest pocket."

"A lead-pencil is often a concealed weapon," said Nick, with a smile. "All local officials are afraid of lead-pencils in the hands of city newspaper men. What did these people say?"

"Nothing that could help me. I think they are stupid. They can tell you when the sun shone that day, when the wind blew, how the shadows of the clouds moved over the waters, but they can't tell a blessed thing about what must have taken place under their noses."

Nick laughed.

"Why," he said, "you were nearer to the murdered man than they, and yet even you can't tell how the trick was done."

"Very true," said Angell, with a sigh. "Well, I was

looking the other way, and so were they. That's all there is to it."

"So they all happened to be looking in another direction at the time? It is strange that, out of fifty pair of eyes, not one should have observed what must have been plainly seen had a glance been taken in that direction."

"Why, there was an explosion in the balloon——"

Nick sprang to his feet.

"Ah! So there was something to attract the common attention? Something took place at the instant the murder was committed?"

"Why, yes; just at that time a balloon went up, and, when over the thicket across the stream, it exploded. I think I turned that way myself to see what was coming off."

"Who sent up the balloon? Was it an unusual occurrence?"

"I don't know."

"Then that is one of the first things for us to ascertain."

"Why is it important?"

"Never mind that now, old man. What occurred next?"

"I can't see what the balloon has to do with my being in danger of being murdered by the officers of the law," said Angell nervously.

"It may have a great deal to do with it," said Nick. "Do you think it a coincidence that the explosion should have attracted every eye from the piazza at the instant the murder was committed?"

"Why, I hadn't thought of that."

"Of course, there may have been design in the explosion," said the detective. "We can look that up later. If so, it shows intelligent action working along plans definitely made—it shows premeditated murder on the part of some one."

"What a plot!" said Angell. "Cunning and damnable! Why didn't I inquire about the balloon? It isn't too late now, is it?"

"Certainly not. Now about this knife. What sort of a knife is it?"

"A long, double-edged, daggerlike thing, with double hand-guard. The blade is nearly a foot long and an inch wide. The handle is unusually heavy for such a weapon."

"Is it old or new?"

"Old, I should say. The blade shows frequent sharp-edges, and the handle is stained and marked."

"It is not your knife?"

The young reporter started angrily.

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

"Just what I say. Did this knife ever belong to you?"

"Never. Why do you ask?"

The young man began to see the folly of quarreling with the famous detective.

"Because you had just such a knife in your hunting outfit a year ago. Don't you remember that knife?"

"Why, I had a knife," was the slow reply. "It was given to me by a chum at the office. I don't remember much about it, however."

"There was a blue burn about the size of a pea on each side of the blade," said Nick, "about the middle as to diameter and close to the guard, and there were three holes, such as might have been made with the point of a knife, on the handle, close to the guard. I remember the knife perfectly."

"You know more about it than I do," said Angell, in an astonished tone.

"Where is it now?"

"In the hunting truck at my rooms. I have never unpacked the valise in which I put it at the camp."

Nick pondered a moment.

"Whom have you been going up against in your newspaper work?" he finally asked.

"No one, lately. Why?"

"I don't like the looks of this," continued Nick. "I begin to see traces of another and stronger plot. There is still another element coming into this game of life and death. Come, I'll wager you the suppers that your knife is not in your valise at your rooms."

The young reporter started from his chair.

"I don't understand what you mean," he said. "Who would steal that old thing? You don't believe that—"

"I never form theories," said Nick. "I believe nothing. The first thing for us to do is to go to your rooms, and see if the knife is there, or whether it is in the custody of the officers at White Beach"

"But how would my knife get to White Beach?"

"Why should the professor drop dead at your side with a hunting-knife in his heart? Come, we may as well be moving."

CHAPTER II.

WHERE NICK AND CHICK DISAGREED.

As the two men passed out of the building where the office of the detective is situated, Nick signaled to a coachman who was sitting patiently on the seat of a stylish-looking rig standing only a few yards from the entrance. The coachman replied with a slight inclination of the head, and touched up his horses, keeping in view of Nick and his companion as they passed along the street.

The coachman played his part well. Inside the closed coach was another man, also sitting patiently waiting for the time of action to come. At the first mention of the character of the knife with which the professor had been killed, Nick had touched a button at the side of his desk, and given a signal which had been heard and obeyed in the room where the famous man's assistants sat while waiting for assignments.

This is a room few people ever see. It is at the top of the tall building, far up from the street, but there is a swift elevator for the use of the occupants of that room alone, and there are wires which connect the apartment with every police station in the city. On this occasion, Nick's three slow rings meant that he wanted two men and a coach to follow him wherever he went. As has been seen, the coach was ready when Nick reached the street. Angell, of course, knew nothing of all this.

From Broadway over to the Bowery, up the Bowery to Cooper Union, east on Seventh Street to Second Avenue, up Second Avenue to Tenth Street, the detective and the young reporter passed, and were soon at the building where Angell's rooms were located. At the vestibule, Nick paused, and looked down the street.

Angell was wondering why Nick had insisted on walking through the crowded streets on such a hot day. Had he known the detective's motive, he would have been doubly alarmed. He would then have known that they had been followed every foot of the way from the Broadway office by two men who dodged in and out of the crowds so deftly that Nick, while now and then catching a glimpse, had not been able to get an identifying look at them.

Nick knew that he was being followed by cunning men, but, for the life of him, he could not see the faces of those who were doing the work.

At first he had hopes that the sneaks would drop behind, thus giving Chick, who was in the coach, a chance to form their acquaintance, but they did nothing of the kind. In face, they appeared to know where Nick was going with his prisoner, and mostly kept on ahead.

There was something about the figures that seemed familiar to the detective. Once, the incidents with which the men had been associated almost came back to his mind, but they faded away again, being dim and hazy at best.

"Now, why should I be trailed in a case of this sort?" he pondered. "In running down criminals, it is not unusual for me to have a criminal gang to fight, but, in a fight for the defense, I can't see where the motive lies."

As Nick and Angell stood there at the entrance to the apartment-house, a newsboy came running down the streets with a bundle of extras under his arm.

"All about the White Beach murder!" he shouted.

Nick bought a paper, and ran through the head-lines, with Angell glancing over his shoulder and growing angrier every instant at the manner in which his brethren of the press had handled the case. According to the special from White Beach, Angell had no chance whatever for his life. The writer convicted him of murder, and electrocuted him. The motive given was a quarrel over the professor's daughter.

As Nick glanced over the paper, a small item at the bottom of one of the first-page columns caught his eyes.

It recorded the escape of a prisoner from Sing Sing. He thrust the paper into his pocket, and turned to Angell.

"Go up to your rooms," he said, "and wait for me. I have a matter of business to attend to before I can join you. And don't move out of the place before I come."

"But I am under arrest for murder," smiled Angell.

"I can trust you," said Nick, hastening away.

Half-way down the block the detective beckoned to the coachman, and the carriage drew up at the curb. Nick stepped inside, and held a short consultation with Chick, giving directions regarding a matter which appeared to be important, for the assistant instantly showed intense excitement.

As Nick left the carriage, Chick said:

"Be careful now, Nick. You know what the risk is."

Nick laughed, and proceeded on his way. At Angell's rooms he found the reporter standing with pale face in the midst of a very wreck of a sleeping-room. The apartment had been hastily searched, and every article designed for the keeping of treasure opened. The valise packed at the hunting-camp nearly a year before lay open in the middle of the floor.

"The knife is gone," gasped Angell. "Who can have taken it?"

"This," said Nick, "is a mighty interesting case."

Angell sank into a chair, and covered his face with his hands.

Nick moved about the littered apartment examining every detail of the place. He removed the lock from the door, and examined it under a glass. He did the same with the locks of the drawers and trunks which had been opened. He inspected every inch of the carpet, and examined the seats of two chairs which had been found standing in front of the dresser. Here the robbers had seated themselves while searching the drawers.

When Angell looked up, the detective was putting something carefully away in his pocketbook.

"What do you make of it?" Nick asked.

"It must be just a coincidence," said the reporter, more hopefully. "It is not unusual for rooms to be looted while the occupant is away. No one could have stolen the knife intending to use it as it was used. Or, it may be that my knife was not used at all. We only surmise that, you know."

"We must hope for the best," said the detective. "And now, old man," he continued, "I have a lot of work to do, and must not be hampered in any way, so you must return to the central station and report to the chief."

Angell shuddered.

"That awful prison," he said.

"You will be given a good room," said Nick, "and will have everything you want, including your liberty if you wish to go out for an airing; only, of course, one of my men will go with you. The chief understands. I will

finish my inspection of the room, and call on you later in the day."

Angell started away, looking as if he had lost his last friend.

After Angell's departure, Nick seated himself in a bay window which overlooked the street, and watched the scene below with a field-glass. He saw Angell pass along Tenth Street on his way to Third Avenue, and saw Chick leave the carriage and follow on behind. The carriage was then driven away.

"I should have had another man with me," Nick thought. "There may be two trails to follow before Angell reaches the station. However, I guess Chick is equal to the emergency."

Nick had set a trap for the men who had been following him.

He had sent Angell away alone not because he wanted him to return to the station. His idea was to ascertain if the spotters would follow him.

If they did, that would settle one point beyond dispute, and it was a very interesting point.

During the brief interview in the carriage, Chick had been given his instructions with reference to this move, and was now watching every step taken by Angell.

His orders were not exactly to pursue Angell, but, rather, to follow any person who trailed on after him.

In half-an-hour's time Nick expected a message from Chick if he trailed Angell to the station without incident. In this case, Nick was to go out into the streets and permit the skulkers to follow him, if he was the one they were after.

The point was one which must be settled at once, for upon it hung one link of the chain which Nick was drawing about the White Beach murderer, whoever he might be.

It seemed paradoxical that the battle against a man who had committed a cowardly murder at a lonely summer resort up the Sound should be shifted to New York, but so it was.

After Angell disappeared in the crowds on the street, Nick resumed his examination of the room. Half-an-hour passed, and no message from Chick arrived. Another half-hour, and Nick, fearing that, somehow, his plans had miscarried, was about to leave the room.

Then there came a knock at the door, and, a second later, Chick, looking both angry and troubled, stepped into the room.

Nick saw by his face that the worst had happened.

"How did he get away?" he asked.

"There was a blockade on the walk, caused by the fainting of a man, and the mob formed between us, and that's all there is to it."

"Have you been to the central station?"

Chick nodded.

"Angell is not there?"

"Not there."

"What's your notion?"

Nick did not appear to be very much annoyed over the occurrence.

"Well, you know Angell better than I do. What's your idea?"

"Do you think he has skipped?"

"To be frank about it, that's what I think."

"For instance?"

"Well, you remember the description of the knife we read in the newspaper this morning?"

"Just before Angell came in? Certainly."

"He admitted owning such a knife?"

"He admitted owning a hunting-knife. He did not know that I had already seen a description of the knife with which the murder was committed, and told me at once where his knife was—or where he believed it to be."

"Of course."

"He seemed to be surprised when I wagered him the suppers that his knife was not at his rooms."

"Exactly, and you were right."

"Yes, the knife was not here. The place has been looted."

"How long was Angell in this room this afternoon before you came?" asked Chick significantly.

Nick laughed.

"You suspect Angell," he said, "and believe that the disorder I found here was created by him during the few moments I talked with you in the carriage? That he used the knife at White Beach, and tried to show by this tumbled room that it had been stolen?"

"Frankly, yes."

It was not often that Nick Carter and his assistant disagreed regarding a case, but they were certainly in a mix-up over the White Beach murder.

"Then, it follows that Angell has jumped, in the interest of a longer life?"

"That's my notion," replied Chick.

"What does the chief of police think?"

"He doesn't think. He leaves it all to you."

"Exactly."

Nick stepped into the corridor, and called up headquarters.

After using the phone for a minute, he hung up the receiver, and pressed the call-button for the custodian of the rooms. In a minute, a tall, thin, sharp-eyed woman made her appearance.

"We are guests of Mr. Angell," Nick said, "and shall occupy his rooms for a few days. Present your bill to me if Angell does not return when payment is due."

"Wait a moment," said Chick, as the woman turned away. "How long was Angell absent from his rooms?"

"He came back to-day for the first time in two weeks."

"Did you see him when he came in?"

"Yes, sir. He said he expected company, and asked if the rooms were tidy."

"And you replied that they were?"

"Of course. They were spick-and-span clean this very morning."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you see the rooms when he came in to-day?"

"No, sir. I stood out in the hall, about where we are now, while he unlocked the door and went in."

"Did he close the door immediately after entering?"

"No, sir, he turned back, holding to the door with his hand, and said something about going away again soon."

"He did not refer to the condition of the room? Said nothing of finding it in disorder?"

"Of course not. The rooms were in the best of condition two hours before his arrival. I saw them myself."

"And no one entered them in the meantime?"

"Not a soul, sir. What's the trouble? Is there anything wrong?"

"No," interrupted Nick. "Everything is all right. This young friend of mine is inquisitive, that's all."

Chick caught the look of warning in the eyes of his superior, and passed into the room, leaving the woman to go about her duties.

Chick greeted Nick with a smile as he closed the door.

"Permit me," he said, "to repeat a question which remains unanswered. How long was Angell alone in this room this afternoon before you came?"

"You're a bright boy," said Nick. "A very bright boy, but you should keep your conclusions under your hat until the end is reached."

"Oh, I'm wrong most of the time, I'll admit," said Chick, "but I guess I'm right about Angell, and I guess you think so, too. Own up, now."

For reply, Nick took the newspaper he had bought an hour before from his pocket, and pointed out the item concerning the escape of a prisoner from Sing Sing.

"Here," he said, "you know where to look for this chap. He had a tough crowd back of him, so be careful where you go, and what chances you take."

"I've handled this chap before," said Chick.

"Round him up," said Nick. "Trace him to the place where he is living, find out where he goes, and get the names of his companions. If he holds conferences with any one, have that one followed. I want the whole crowd cleaned up."

"It is about time," said Chick. "There are other warrants for this fellow?"

"Yes, two old ones, and a new complaint to be made."

"Some fresh devilry, eh? Has he been busy since he got away?"

Chick looked at the paper in his hand.

"Why," he said, "he's been out three days."

"He is hiding in the city," said Nick. "That is enough

to know at this time. Follow him night and day until you locate his hang-out. That is the important thing now. No arrests until I give the word."

"I see."

"And use every man on the force, if necessary, and get more from the chief of police."

"All right."

CHAPTER III.

PATSY COMES TO THE FRONT.

Chick went away feeling depressed at his misunderstanding with his chief, and wishing that he had kept his mouth shut regarding his conclusions in the White Beach murder case.

He was fully satisfied that he had been given the assignment to run Black Harry and his gang to earth in order that Nick might not be bothered with his ideas while the Angell case was being investigated.

"And to make up for this throw-down," smiled Chick, "I'll just go ahead, and round-up Black Harry and his crowd good and proper."

Nick laughed as his assistant took his departure.

"Fine fellow," he thought, "but immature, and—yes—premature. Now, I wonder what sort of a woman this sharp-eyed custodian of these rooms is? I'll wager a hat she has company to-night, and, if she does, I'll be here to see."

Going into the hallway, Nick pressed the call-button again. The woman came reluctantly this time.

"What do you want?" she demanded sharply.

Nick took out a roll of bills.

"I find that Angell left quite a muss in there," he said, "and I want you to have it cleaned up. You may take your time about it, for no one will occupy the rooms to-night."

As he spoke, Nick watched the face of the woman closely. He thought she looked pleased at the information.

"Angell will not return for a week," continued Nick. "He went away in a rage over the loss of some proof in a criminal case about to be begun. He struck it, I believe, while at work for his paper. At any rate, he can't send the man he is after to the penitentiary until he finds a long black pocketbook, which seems to have become lost. If you find such a thing when you clean up the rooms, let me know."

Nick thought the woman's eyes flashed with joy at what he was saying. There was no doubt about the interest she was taking in the conversation.

"Here's ten dollars," he said. "You clean up the rooms, and keep a sharp eye out for that black pocketbook. I'll be here in the morning."

The woman took the money greedily.

Nick went back to Angell's rooms, and took a long

black pocketbook which he had observed lying under the table, stuffed it with an odd collection of letters and bills found on the floor, and tucked it away at the bottom of a trunk, which he packed full of clothes.

"There," he said, "we'll see how long they will hunt for that, who wants it, and why he wants it."

Then he created greater disorder, if possible, in the room by tossing clothing about, and had a final talk with police headquarters by telephone. The information gained from the central station was not encouraging, to say the least.

Angell had not presented himself there, and the chief was annoyed. It was a careless way of handling a prisoner charged with murder, he said, and, besides, the officer from White Beach who had brought the man to New York for a conference with Nick Carter was becoming alarmed. The detective hung up the receiver with the promise that he would have the prisoner at headquarters in an hour's time.

But how? Angell had not run away. Nick was certain of that. The next question was whether he had been captured by the gang led by the escaped convict, which had sent out spies to dog his footsteps on the way to the rooms. If so, he might be murdered before help could reach him. Nick understood well enough why Black Harry wanted Angell.

The young reporter had been a prominent witness in the trial of Black Harry, who had recently escaped from Sing Sing. In addition to this, Angell held proof of the outlaw's participation in another crime, a brutal murder. It is a dangerous thing to be able to give decisive evidence against a gang of crooks in New York, and nothing seemed more probable than that the outlaw had captured Angell.

When informed by Chick that Angell had disappeared, Nick had treated the matter lightly in the presence of his assistant, but his active brain, under all his seeming indifference, had been planning to aid the lost man. It was now time to act. A perilous hunt was on, and, in the meantime, the White Beach officers were waiting.

Acting under instructions, Chick would cover every resort of the gang, and might discover Angell, or some trace of him. He did not care to inform even Chick of the supposed capture of the young reporter, for that would have rendered an explanation necessary, and this explanation he did not want to make at that time. There were other reasons, which will appear in due time. Besides, Chick would do as good service in the search without this information. Now, how to quiet the White Beach officer who had trusted his prisoner to him?

Nick pondered over the matter for a moment, and was ready to act. He hastened to his down-town office, and summoned one of his best men, a young, clean-cut fellow about Angell's size, and having the reporter's complexion.

"Now, Patsy," he said, "I have a disagreeable job for you."

"It is not a question of an ugly assignment," said Patsy. "The only point is whether I can do the work."

"I am going to give you a trial," said Nick. "If you fail, it will get me into trouble with the chief of police. Is that an incentive for you to do your best?"

"You know it," was the cheerful reply.

"Well," said Nick coolly, "you are to disguise yourself as a young man who came here this morning, and go to police headquarters and be taken into custody. You may be obliged to remain in the Tombs or the prison at White Beach for an indefinite period. About all you have to do is to play the part of an innocent man accused of crime, and keep your mouth shut."

"What am I charged with?" asked Patsy, with a smile.

"Murder!"

Patsy emitted a low whistle.

In a few words, Nick explained the situation as far as he cared to, and together they went to the clothing-room. Nick had a clear idea as to the clothing worn by Angell and his general carriage, even to the peculiar twist of his necktie. The face make-up was not quite so easy, but in ten minutes an exact reproduction of Angell stood in the room.

This done, Nick disguised himself as a rounder, choosing a rather loud suit of clothes, and marking lines of dissipation on his face. So perfect was the disguise that his best friend would not have known him.

In a few minutes both men were in the private office of the chief of police, who did not recognize the detective, much to the satisfaction of the latter.

"Here is Angell," he said.

"All right," said the chief. "Call that White Beach man," he said to an attendant.

In a moment, George Marsh, deputy sheriff at the summer resort, entered the room. Would he recognize the man as Angell? Nick waited in suspense for an instant, and then the officer advanced, and took Patsy by the hand.

"You were long enough about your business," he said, with a smile. "Were you successful?"

"Nick Carter can answer that question," said the disguised detective.

The officer started at the sound of Patsy's voice.

"I guess you must have taken cold," he said.

"I am afraid so," was the reply. "This worry is enough to cause a man to take anything, though there isn't much cold lying about to-day for one to get hold of."

The officer seemed satisfied.

"We must go back to White Beach to-night," he said.

Patsy shuddered at the idea of being locked up in a country prison.

"Talk with Mr. Carter before you make up your mind on that point," he said. He did not like the idea of being locked up for another man—a man who had skipped!

The country officer regarded the disguised Nick with glances of disapproval. He had not expected to find a rowdy in the famous detective, and Nick certainly looked the part he was playing.

The chief of police had given a start of surprise at the mention of Nick's name in connection with the loudly dressed man, but he saw the motive at once, and kept his peace. He had seen the detective in many disguises, but never in a more perfect one.

"It may be well to keep Angell here another day," said Nick, in answer to the appealing glance of his assistant.

"I have my orders from the sheriff," said the deputy.

"I know the sheriff, and can fix that," said Nick, "and will attend to it at once."

Patsy was taken away to be locked up in Angell's place, and the deputy sheriff went his way, bent on seeing the sights of the town with a neat roll of bills which Nick had slipped him during the course of the short argument concerning a day's delay in removing the prisoner.

"Where did you find Angell?" asked the chief, as soon as they were alone together.

"I didn't find him," said Nick. "That's Patsy, one of my best men."

"Then Angell has——"

The chief looked vexed, not only at the supposed escape of Angell, but at the trick that had been played on him. The idea of bringing a disguised detective back to represent a man held for murder!

"Angell has disappeared," said Nick, "and, with your permission, we will let Patsy personate him for a day or two, until the real man is found. I understand that the country sheriff was getting nervous, and fixed up this scheme to set his fears at rest."

"But if you can't find Angell?"

"Then I shall take Patsy out, and give out the report that the prisoner escaped from me—personally," said Nick.

"That would not read well in the newspapers. Nick Carter does not permit men to escape him," said the chief.

"Well," said the detective, "I took the risk, and I'll take the blame, so set your mind at rest on that point."

"How are you getting on with the case?" asked the chief.

"I have made little progress. In fact, I seem to have been working on a false clue. My first idea was that the Black Harry bunch searched the rooms for the proof Angell is well known to have against the chief of the gang. You see, the trouble all occurred just after Harry broke out of the pen."

"Well, that is probably the correct theory. They found the knife, and either tried to murder Angell with it, or used it where it would be apt to send him to the place where he is trying to send Black Harry—to the electric chair. That would be a clever revenge, wouldn't it?"

"A wicked revenge," said Nick, "but I am not certain

that this gang has mixed up in the affair. If they are after the proof, I shall know to-night."

Nick explained the trap which had been set with the black pocketbook as a bait.

"Perhaps they got the proof on the first search," suggested the chief. "Got it when they stole the knife."

"They would not know whether they had it all," said Nick. "Even if they found what they were looking for, they would go back at the suggestion of there being more in a certain black pocketbook."

"You are right," said the chief, "as you always are. And you will be there to receive them?"

"Of course. Chick will trail them in, and I shall be there to see the doings."

"Well," said the chief, "it looks like Harry's work, all right, for it occurred just after he got out of Sing Sing, as you say, and no one else would have a motive in searching the rooms."

"Perhaps."

"When you find the people who did the searching, you will find the people who committed the murder. There is no other theory to work on, so far as I can see."

"There is one thing I neglected to mention," said Nick, "and that is, that the custodian of the rooms will swear that they were in fine shape this morning. In other words, that Angell must have mussed them himself. You know what that means?"

"That Angell took the knife away with him, used it in killing the professor, and hastened back to New York to make his rooms look as if they had been looted and the knife stolen."

"Exactly."

"What do you make of it all?"

"One of two things is true. Either Harry has nothing to do with the White Beach murder, or the woman is a confederate, and lies."

"What is your notion?"

"I shall know to-night," replied Nick evasively.

"You think the woman lies?"

"Yes, I think she does."

"And that brings us back to the theory that the rooms were looted and the knife stolen before the murder was committed, and that Angell did not disarrange his own rooms to protect himself?"

"Perhaps."

"Then, unless you believe that the robbery took place after the murder was committed, but before Angell went there this morning, you will not drop the Black Harry end of the case at once?"

"Not at all. Black Harry may have captured Angell to keep him off his track, and still know nothing of the murder at White Beach. You see the disappearance of Angell and the murder do not necessarily go together."

"I see."

"Angell can send Harry to the chair without the papers."

"Yes."

"And the outlaw would go after him the moment he regained his liberty?"

"Undoubtedly. Well, the case is a mixed one, and it's up to you to straighten it out."

CHAPTER IV.

THROUGH THE PEEP-HOLE.

Leaving Patsy a prisoner, with a request that he be treated with all courtesy, Nick left headquarters, and hastened in the direction of the apartment-house on Tenth Street.

He had great respect for the judgment of the chief of police, but he could hardly believe that Harry would take a knife from Angell's apartment, and use it in a murder when all the officers knew that he, Harry, was the only crook in town who would have a motive in searching the reporter's rooms.

Black Harry was a cunning rascal, and he would understand that the use of the knife, and his escape at that time, would turn the eyes of the police in his direction. He would not take that risk.

But he would abduct Angell, and murder him, if he got a chance, and this was why Nick was having him and his whole gang trailed.

There is where Harry would take a chance, and take a big one.

It was Angell's death, or the electric chair for him.

Nick had an idea that there would be hot work at the apartment-house that night.

He fully believed that the woman was a member of the gang which had looted the rooms. His examination of the locks had shown the introduction of no picklock or strange key. The usual key had been used on the door.

Just before dark, he walked into the office of the building, and asked for a room. He acted like a drunken man. He stuttered and staggered, and would have the room he wanted, or none at all.

It must be on the third floor, facing the street, and near the middle of the building.

This described a room directly over the suite occupied by Angell.

The clerk explained that the only rooms answering this description were rented, but Nick showed a large roll of bank-notes, and declared, with many a stagger, that he would pay three months in advance if he could only get just exactly the apartment he had set his heart on, and entered into a long and seemingly drunken explanation of why he wanted a room on the third floor that faced the street near the middle of the building. He declared it would be quieter there, and that he had often seen flowers in the window at about the place he wanted, and he always

loved flowers, and would make it all right if he could have the room he wanted.

Nick appeared to be just drunk enough to pay almost any price for the whim of having a certain room, and the clerk said he thought it might be fixed, as the man who had that room was a friend of his, and might change if given an inducement to do so.

In the end, Nick parted with quite a sum of money and got the room, which was over the sitting-room of the suite occupied by the young reporter. The former occupant was there getting his stuff out when Nick staggered in. He had his trunk packed, and the porter was helping him carry it to another room opening off the same corridor.

The fellow looked about like the individual Nick was dressed and made up to represent. His clothing was loud in pattern, and worn with a hit-me-quick air which always annoyed the detective. Besides this, he looked as if he had been on a long spree, and was nervous in consequence. He sized Nick up for what he pretended to be, and began a familiar conversation at once.

The detective got rid of him as soon as he could, refusing many pressing invitations to go down and take a "quencher," but, during the short time the fellow talked, Nick discovered that he was a gambler and a general short-card man, always on the lookout for "easy money."

At last he went away, declaring that, if he had coped the queen the night before, he would have had money to burn, and would not have changed his room for any one, and Nick settled down to work.

There was a large rug on the floor of the room, and Nick rolled it back so as to get at the boards at about the center of the apartment. Then he bored through the flooring, and cut out a piece about twelve inches square. The work of cutting away the laths and scraping the plaster off the ceiling paper below was more difficult, but at last it was accomplished, and a foot of the ceiling to Angell's room hung by one side, so it could be pulled up like a trap-door. This gave him a full view of the room underneath.

It was dark by this time, and the only light in the room was that which came through the bay window from a street light.

As Nick sat waiting in the semitwilight of the place, he heard a key in the lock of the room below. He was at his observation point in an instant.

He saw a figure, evidently that of a man, moving through the room in the direction of the window, through which the street light shone, as through the one above. He heard the heavy cloth shades pulled down, and, a moment later, the click of a button.

The next instant, the room was flooded with electric light.

Nick doubted the accuracy of his sight when the light flared up.

The person who stood in the room below was Angell, the man whom he believed to be a prisoner with the Black Harry gang.

It did not seem possible that Angell could be there, for his being there meant treachery.

It seemed that Chick was right, and that the reporter had betrayed his friend, and run away.

It apparently meant more; that he was, indeed, a murderer, for the innocent do not flee!

Nick did not intend that Angell should escape him.

He had a notion at that time that Angell would look much better behind the bars at the central station than Patsy, who was probably waiting for his release.

Angell evidently belonged there, and Patsy did not.

Nick was very much disgusted.

As he crouched there, Nick heard a sound of whispering at the door of the room below.

Then he saw that the door stood slightly ajar, and that some one was saying something to Angell, who listened with his head bent forward, and his eyes fixed upon the crack in the door with a strange intentness.

Then the detective noticed the peculiar pallor which lay upon the face of the reporter. He looked like a man who had just been released from a long term in prison. His eyes seemed enlarged and unusually bright. Was it Angell? Yes; there could be no doubt of it.

He moved about as if numb, like an automaton.

Nick could not hear a word of what was said.

The voice at the door sounded as much like the hiss of a serpent as anything else.

Whoever was at the door was keeping out of sight, which seemed to Nick to be a strange thing to do, as the room was entirely unoccupied save for Angell's presence.

He listened and waited, hoping that the approach of some of the roomers would drive the person into the room for an instant.

But no sounds came from the hall. The place was as still as if it had been ordered deserted for that minute's work.

Presently the sounds of talking, or whispering, ceased, and Angell turned mechanically away from the door, and began a methodical search of the debris lying on the floor.

He moved like one in a dream. Something was wrong!

If the door opening into the hall had been shut, Nick would have spoken to him.

But the door was still ajar, and Nick had every reason to think that some one was watching there.

Nick was angry at Angell for playing him such a trick.

He had little doubt that Angell had visited his room to secure his valuables prior to leaving the country.

Angell was now throwing clothing, books, pictures, fancy and expensive articles bought at art sales, and even bits of jewelry, aside like chips.

Clearly he was not in quest of valuables.

Now and then, the hissing voice at the doorway was heard, giving some whispered direction probably.

Presently, at the bottom of a box of papers, Angell found a long package done up in heavy coarse cloth, which seemed to be sewed together.

The article inside could not be seen, of course, but its shape was plainly revealed as Angell moved it about.

It appeared to be a collection of pebbles or beads, strung together, and wound in a ball. As the package moved in Angell's hand, the ball seemed to unwind, the beads slipping away—until the cloth covering seemed to hold only a long string of beads.

Angell took this to the door, and held it up for the inspection of some person there. Then he sprang back, as if avoiding a grasping hand.

Presently he put the package in an inside pocket, and turned back into the room.

Nick was more than puzzled. What was Angell doing there?

To his knowledge, he was not possessed of diamonds, or other valuable articles, which would bring him voluntarily back to his rooms in the face of the peril to life his capture would mean.

"The only way to solve this new problem," thought Nick, "is to get the young man where he can answer a few questions."

An interruption came at this moment. A hoarse and tipsy voice was heard at the door.

"Whose got me keys?"

This was followed by a great pounding, which seemed to attract the attention of the man in the room below. Nick saw him turn toward the door, and then spring forward, eagerly, like a person imbued with a new resolve.

The pounding on the door continued. There was only one thing the detective could do. He must give the loafer outside, probably the former occupant of the room, a knock-out blow, and rush down-stairs. The reporter might make for the hall and the street at any moment.

Nick opened the door with a quick motion, and stepped out into the hall. There was no one there. The corridor was dark. Every light had been extinguished. The person who had disrupted his plans might be a yard away, but he was not in sight. Nothing was in sight. The darkness seemed thick enough to cut.

As Nick groped his way in the direction of the staircase, a sudden dash of some liquid substance struck him full in the face. A sickening odor accompanied the moist attack. A thousand lights danced before the detective's burning eyes, and he staggered about, his head a-whirl, his senses fast leaving him.

CHAPTER V.

TANGLED THREADS.

The necessity of keeping on his feet and at work, and the peril of losing himself for even an instant, came over

the detective's mind, but the drug was too strong. The vapor seemed to have permeated every nerve and tissue of his body. In the darkness it seemed to form a wall about his reeling body, shutting him out from the world, shutting him into a region of unaccountable motion and unaccountable sounds. His head whirled. With one last effort he threw himself into a small side hall and that was all. The last thing he heard was the sound of a struggle down-stairs, and the hiss of angry voices.

With all that depended on the next minute of time, the detective had been knocked out by some cunning enemy.

Presently, he had no notion of the measure of time, Nick became half-conscious of two loud explosions, followed by an odor of burning gunpowder. For an instant he had no notion where he was, then he saw a muffled face bending over him.

He found himself wondering where the light by which he saw came from, for the place where he lay seemed perfectly dark. Then he saw a slender waxen taper held in a sinewy hand, an arm extending into a mass of wrappings. No sound came from the lips which bent above him.

Then another hand came into view, and it held a gleaming knife. Nick thought he must be dreaming, for he had no power to move out of the center of that weird light, no strength to escape the knife which was nearing his throat. His sensation was that of a dreamer—conscious of the peril about him, yet resigning himself to let it destroy him.

Then there came a sudden illumination, a sharp cry, a shot, and the evil face, the knife, the muffled figure, disappeared.

And Nick found himself sitting up on the floor of the hall with the electric light ablaze and his head resting on Chick's shoulder. An officer in uniform stood at the head of the stairs, and two others were clearing the halls of the excited roomers. The woman custodian stood with her arms akimbo, looking on with a sneer on her sullen face.

"Pretty close call, eh?" Nick asked.

"That's India poison, all right," said Chick. "I wonder where Black Harry's bunch got that?"

"How did you happen to come just in time?" asked Nick, getting to his feet dizzily. "I should have been a goner in a second."

"I trailed one of the gang in here," was the reply, "and saw that something was going on. I heard your shot and came up."

"Heard my shot?"

Chick pointed to Nick's revolver, lying by his side on the floor, two chambers discharged.

"Don't you recall shooting?" he asked.

Nick shook his head.

"Did I hit any one?" he asked. "The shooting was

entirely involuntary and from force of habit, so I probably missed."

"You did miss," said Chick. "The only wonder is that, with this drug on your brain, you managed to shoot at all."

"The brain and the muscles it controls have more involuntary activities than we know anything about," said Nick. "Where is the fellow with the knife?"

Nick glanced hastily about the place.

"He escaped," said Chick.

"Escaped?"

"Just vanished in the air."

"How do you account for that?" asked Nick.

"I give it up," was the reply. "I never saw a man get away so swiftly. He must be a bird on a long-distance run."

"One of the gang?"

"Probably."

"Why was he muffled up in that outlandish way?"

Chick shook his head.

"I can't understand it," he said. "I've got Bart Manners down in the hall below. Policeman's watching him. He wasn't wrapped up like a mummy. I caught him at Pell street and shadowed him here. There's something doing in this house, all right."

"I should think so," said Nick. "They came near getting me."

"You may as well talk with Bart," said Chick. "Perhaps he can put you wise to what is doing."

In front of the door to Angell's rooms in the hall below the detectives found an officer guarding Bart Manners, one of Black Harry's most vicious lieutenants. The outlaw was swearing fit to rouse the street. Nick started to speak with him, but the woman in charge of the place stepped in front of him.

"What you doing here?" she demanded. "Your room is up there."

"If this woman doesn't keep quiet," said Chick to the officer, "lock her up."

In company with the prisoner, the detectives started for Angell's rooms. Again the woman barred the way.

"I won't keep quiet," she cried. "You don't belong on this floor. You were drunk when you came here, and you're drunk now. Get out."

Nick pushed her aside and tried the door to the reporter's rooms.

It was locked. Nick turned about in amazement. During all that frenzy of shooting and attempted murder, who had had the forethought to lock the place? He asked the question of the woman.

"It's none of your business," she shouted. "You let that man go and go on about your business."

"Ah, and so you are interested in this man?" asked Nick.

"I came here to——"

It was Bart who spoke.

"Shut up!" shouted the woman. "You keep your mouth shut."

"What is it, Bart?" asked Nick.

"I got word that she wanted to see me," said Bart, glancing toward the woman as if to make sure he was safe from physical violence, "and came up with this man of yours close to me heels."

Nick unlocked the door and the three entered, much to the disgust of the woman, who had to be kept out by force.

"Have you been in here before to-night?" asked Nick, turning to the prisoner.

"No; just got here."

"Who was with you?"

Bart motioned to Chick.

"No one else?"

Bart shook his head.

"Is that right, Chick?"

"He came alone, so far as I know," was the reply.

"Then who was that upstairs?"

"There was no one with me," said Bart. "My business with the woman was private."

"You were to search this room?"

Bart looked surprised, but nodded.

"For a black pocketbook supposed to contain proofs against Black Harry."

"How do you know that?"

"You helped to search this room once before, but did not find what you wanted, so you came back to-night."

"I never helped to search this room, never knew it was searched, never knew there was any such proofs here, neither did Black Harry," asserted Bart, with every appearance of candor.

Nick and his assistant exchanged meaning glances. If the Black Harry gang had not had the rooms searched in the interest of the master outlaw, who had done it, and with what motive?

It began to look to Nick as though Angell knew more about the matter than any one else. And Angell had escaped.

There was a mystery on, all right.

"Was there any one in this room when you came into the hall, or any one standing in the hall, at the door of this room?" asked Nick, turning to Chick.

"When I got here," said Chick, "this woman he tells

about was in the hall. She spied me, and just then Bart shoots, and the lights go out. It seems to me that I did see a motion at this door just as the lights flickered, but I'm not sure."

"Did you hear any one leaving by this door?"

"Oh, the shots rang up the very old Nick," said Chick, "and there was a crowd in the hall in a minute. But I got hold of Bart and turned him over to the first officer who came. Then I went up-stairs to investigate the shooting there. That's all there is to it."

"That does not account for the man who attacked me," said Nick. "He must have come from somewhere, and gone somewhere."

"I give it up," said Chick.

"You've been smokin'," growled Bart.

"What have you done with Angell?" asked Nick.

"What you givin' me?" demanded Bart. "Angell is pinched."

"But he was abducted by your crowd this afternoon while on his way to headquarters," said Nick. "If you give him up, I'll let you go. If you don't I see that you get a seat in the electric chair. I know enough about you to fix that."

"We don't know nothin' about Angell," was the sullen reply. "You can't do anything to me, either. I've never done anything to get the iron halo on me nut. See?" Chick looked at his chief and smiled. That smile said, as plainly as words could have done, "You see I was right. Angell betrayed your confidence and ran away."

The Black Harry clue to the murder and to Angell's disappearance was showing brittle, but it was not Nick's theory, after all.

Thus far Nick Carter had not made a howling success of the White Beach murder case. In short, he seemed to have muddled things badly.

But he was working along well-defined lines, and was certain that he would win in the end. Angell had escaped him twice, but he could not find it in his heart to doubt the young fellow with whom he had passed so many pleasant hours in the forests.

Nick called the officer in and sent Bart away with him. Then he turned to Chick.

"That seems to be the truth," he said. "There goes the Black Harry theory of the chief of police."

Chick laughed.

"I guess you know who killed the professor and who searched these rooms," he said.

"You mean Angell?"

"Sure. He's cut his lucky long before this."

"Then," said Nick, with a laugh, "I guess we'll let Patsy die for him."

"What do you mean?"

Nick explained the events of the afternoon.

"Poor Patsy!" said Chick, with a smile. "He's having a merry time, I guess—nit!"

"He'll soon be out," said Nick.

"When you find Angell," said Chick. "Why, I'll gamble that the young scamp is a hundred miles away by this time."

"Then he has made the distance in ten minutes," said Nick.

"I don't understand."

"He was in this room ten minutes ago."

Then, in answer to his assistant's look of wonder, Nick related his experiences just previous to Chick's arrival.

"It beats anything I ever heard of," said the assistant.

"What's on now?"

"Find Angell," said Nick.

"And find the murderer?" asked Chick.

The chief shook his head.

"I can't believe that yet," he said.

"It's all a matter of opinion, anyhow," said Chick.

"The first thing for you to do," said Nick, "is to go to White Beach. There are several things up there that need looking into."

"All right."

"Go as a professor, daffy on bugs or something, so you can hunt about in the woods."

"Hunt in the woods for the murderer! You've got me going this time, chief."

"You will receive your instructions as you go along."

"Very well."

"Learn all you can about the professor's past life, and that of his daughter."

"Of course"

"And learn all you can about the location any one must have occupied in order to have committed the crime."

Chick smiled.

"Trace that knife from the hand of the murderer to the spot where the professor sat."

"That's a short game," said Chick, "even if the scent is old."

"Never mind that foolish notion you have," said Nick, not at all annoyed by the obstinacy of his assistant in holding to his first idea of the White Beach tragedy. "You will have enough to do up there, and your immature notion won't hurt."

"I shall want something pretty lively," said Chick, "in order to keep an interest in the case."

"You may get into hot water up there."

"I fear not," laughed Chick. "Do you think I can follow that knife through the air?"

"That knife was thrown through the air," said Nick.

"Then it was in the hands of a person who should be on the stage," suggested Chick.

"He may be on the stage."

"What are you driving at?"

"Find out where the knife was thrown from."

"I can't follow the track of a knife through the air, at least when the scent is three days old," said Chick pleasantly.

"There was an explosion there just when the knife was thrown," continued Nick. "Find out where that balloon came from, who sent it up, where it was purchased, and all about it."

"Yes," said Chick dubiously.

"Because," said Nick, "that explosion was premeditated. It was arranged to attract every eye in another direction when the knife was thrown."

"It looks that way"

"Now, then, if Black Harry or any of his gang had to do with the murder, they can be traced to that spot. If they did not, their presence in the city can be shown. I'll put some of the other boys on that end of the case."

"And Angell?"

"I'll find him if he is in the city."

"He seems to be a slippery chap."

"I still believe him to be honest, although I must admit that the thing looks bad for him."

"But he ran away. You said yourself that there was no one in sight when he was in this room, half an hour ago."

"Oh, there was no one in sight, but I am sure that he was watched from the door."

"Well, he had a chance to get away when all this racket burst out, didn't he?"

"Perhaps he did get away."

Let us suppose he did. If he is innocent he would

have found out what was coming off and fallen into your arms. Guilty, he would sneak off alone, as he did, glad to be rid of his companion in crime."

"That is all very well," said Nick, "but you must take into consideration the fact that Angell did not know that I was within a mile of this house. For all he knew, the ruction was made by a part of the gang he was with."

"Well," said Chick, "there's a dead man up at White Beach, and there's a murderer somewhere. We have been at the case long enough to let the accused man escape."

"And long enough," said Nick, "to take hold of the most likely and simplest theory of the crime and explode it. We have found out that Black Harry's crowd didn't do the trick, the notion of the chief of police to the contrary notwithstanding."

"I never mixed that push up with it," said Chick.

"Of course not. You've been wanting to get Angell in the electric chair ever since you came into the case."

"And you," laughed Chick, "have been working to get some member of the Black Harry crowd in tow, and when you get him, and get him right, you lose out. Who searched these rooms—asking the question of the theory that Bart told the truth?"

"When we find that person, we'll find the murderer."

"What was Angell doing back here?"

Nick laughed.

"I wish I knew," he said.

Chick said no more. It was a rare thing for him to disagree with his chief in the handling of a case, but in this one he seemed positive that Nick was wrong. He fully believed that Angell ought to be in the Tombs, and wondered that Nick had taken such chances.

He had little taste for the assignment to White Beach, for he had no idea that anything would be discovered there.

CHAPTER VI.

THE TELLTALE MARKS ON THE TREE.

In a few moments, after announcing to the woman that the rooms must be closely watched, the detective took his departure, leaving Chick to proceed to White Beach.

"We seem to be working this case by elimination," said Nick, as Chick bade him good-by. "We have found who did *not* commit this murder. Now let us find out who did."

As the reader already knows, Chick thought he already

knew, and that he was going on a fool's errand, but he said nothing.

He went up on a night train, and in the early morning registered at the summer resort hotel which had been the scene of the murder. The funeral of the dead man had taken place the day before his arrival, and the excitement and horror of the thing was dying out.

The amusement seekers at the resort were too busy thinking out plans for their own pleasure to long bear in mind the incidents of the mystery which had deprived them of a not very popular member of the little coterie of summer loafers.

The first thing Chick did was to inquire for despatches from his chief. He received one, dated long after midnight, saying that there were no new developments in the city. Then came a puzzler. The despatch, which was in cipher, closed as follows:

"Take note of every tree, post, barn, fence, firm surface of any sort. Make a wide circuit and thorough job of it."

"Well, of all the fool propositions I ever bumped up against," said Chick to himself, after translating the code, "this takes the cake. Now, what does he expect me to find on these trees, posts, et al? Pshaw! Nick has a good reason for what he is doing, so here goes."

All of Chick's mental criticisms of his chief ended in about the same way. Nick was nearly always right in his deductions, and when he gave detail orders they meant something.

Chick talked with the people about the hotel, but learned nothing.

He inquired for the daughter of the murdered man, but was told she had gone to the city.

"Well," he thought, "it's me for the dumb witnesses of the crime."

He began work close to the house. Every unusual mark on tree or post was noted down. Now he knew why Nick had suggested that he go as a bug-hunter.

At first the people watched him, acting as if they believed him to be insane, and he was glad when his work took him to the thicket across the shallow stream from the resort hotel.

This thicket was in a comparatively wild state. There were few big trees, but the surface of the earth was covered with a thick undergrowth. Now, in the height of summer, the paths through the place were overhung with bushes, here and there a wild blackberry or bramble-

growth threatening the clothing and the flesh of those passing along the wild ways.

In the afternoon of the first day Chick came upon a great oak in a secluded part of the thicket. It was separated from the part where the paths were by a piece of low ground, where water stood in pools when rain fell heavily, and where vegetation which grows best in damp places thrived wonderfully. At many periods during the summer the swale would be impassable.

This little nook, being thus difficult of access, had not been visited often by the summer visitors at the resort.

As Chick approached the tree he saw that the bark and a round section of the trunk had been scarred by some sharp-pointed instrument. In fact, so often had the instrument been applied to the one spot, not more than six inches in diameter, and about a man's height from the ground, that the fibers had fallen away, cut in every direction, and there was a shallow hole in the tree.

From the root of the tree, directly under the great scar, a well-defined path led into the thicket. It was a narrow path, but it was beaten hard, all vegetation having been worn away by passing footsteps.

Chick followed it only to discover that it came to an abrupt end sixty feet away from the tree.

The detective paced the distance. Just sixty feet.

Now, what had been going on?

In an instant it came to Chick.

Knife-throwing!

Here some one had practised.

Day after day the work must have gone on, for the path and the tree told the story well.

Back sixty feet to throw.

Up to the tree to get the knife.

Scores, hundreds, thousands of times!

Sixty feet!

There was the round hole in the earth where the foot of the knife-thrower had been braced.

It was at the end of the path.

There were no such places between the end and the tree.

Why should the distance always be sixty feet?

It is a long distance to throw a knife and strike a person in the heart.

But this practise had been perfect.

Thousands of knife-holes were within an inch of the center. A blade thrown thus accurately must be certain to strike a vital spot and do murder.

Then, from the place where the murdered man sat, count twenty good paces and the place where the murderer stood will be revealed.

For, if he had practised at sixty feet he would throw at sixty feet.

"Nick was right," thought Chick. "Now, I'll see about where this fellow stood when he did the trick."

He hastened back to the bank of the stream, entered his boat and started to cross to the shore where the hotel stood.

About the middle of the stream he stopped paddling. This was about sixty feet from the porch of the hotel.

The murderer must have stood in a boat when the fatal cast was made.

But there were other boats on the river that day.

How could one throw a knife and not be seen?

The explosion!

Yes, the explosion.

For an instant every eye had been turned in the direction of the thicket.

The murderer had guarded his points well.

Chick sat down in the boat and studied the thing out.

"First," he thought, "I'd like to give myself a swift kick. Here I've been accusing Angell, and Nick has been laughing at me. How did he know what I should find out there?"

"Pshaw! any one might have guessed. The knife was thrown, and what is more reasonable than that the party should want to practise before taking chances on such a throw?"

"Angell didn't practise knife-throwing. He wasn't out here in a boat when the wound was made. He didn't send up the balloon which had been fixed to explode!

"He was right there by the professor when he fell dead, and knows no more about the crime than I do—not so much, for I'll bet a hat he is not posted regarding the marks on the tree or the distance shown by the path.

"Yes, it's a long distance to throw a knife at so small a thing as a man's beating heart, but the move was successful in this case. I wonder if Nick suspects all this?"

But when Chick tried to locate the person who sent up the balloon on the day of the murder he was not so successful.

No one knew anything about it. No one had seen the balloon before it was above the thicket across the river. It would never have been thought of the second time had the explosion not taken place.

Chick gave up that end of the case and wired results to Nick.

CHAPTER VII.

A CLUE AT LAST.

When Nick Carter received Chick's despatch telling of the finding of the knife-thrower's practise spot, he was waiting in the parlor of a house on Twenty-third Street for Miss Clara Howard, daughter of the murdered man, to make her appearance.

He had already sent in his card, and had been informed that the girl, who had denied herself to all since the tragedy which had made her an orphan, would see him.

The telegram had been forwarded from his down-town office. While at work on an important case he never got out of touch with his office and the telegraph-wire.

He read the cipher message with a smile on his lips.

"And so Chick gives up his theory of Angell's guilt," he mused. "This may be good news for Miss Clara."

A moment later the girl entered the room and advanced frankly to the detective's side. "Her hand-shake means something," thought Nick, as the slender, muscular fingers lay for an instant in his own.

The girl was tall and slim, and blond and pretty. Nick was attracted at once to her steady, truthful eyes, to her broad, open brow.

"The girl couldn't lie if she wanted to," he thought.

He was soon to discover that truth may be obstinate as well as loyal.

"I am glad to meet you, Mr. Carter," she said. "I know why you are here, and wish you success in your work."

A little sigh accompanied the words. It was not a hopeful voice that spoke.

"I have something here which concerns Angell's side of the case," said Nick, taking out the telegram.

"I beg your pardon," said the girl, "but I do not care to discuss Mr. Angell's side of the case."

Nick was surprised, but tried not to show it.

"Very well," he said. "Let that pass for the present. You understand that you will be summoned to testify before the coroner's jury, and that you will be asked regarding the relations between your father and young Angell?"

"Certainly. I shall tell the truth."

"Do you mean that the truth is not in the interest of Angell?"

"It is not."

"They quarreled?"

"Often."

"The cause?"

"That is a long story."

The girl looked steadily into the eyes of the famous detective and answered his questions briefly, concisely, like an expert.

"Was it about your engagement that they fell out?"

"It was not. Father became reconciled to that."

"Will you state, briefly, the cause of the trouble?"

"Father doubted the honesty of Mr. Angell?"

This was a corker, and set Nick back like a blow.

"Doubted Angell's honesty!" he repeated. "Had they financial matters in common."

"I don't know what it was all about."

"Your father never told you."

"He never did."

"Nor Angell?"

"Nor Angell."

"Where, then, did you get the notion?"

"From conversations overheard?"

"Ah! You listened when they believed themselves to be alone?"

The girl straightened in her chair and her eyes flashed.

"I never did."

"Yet you heard?"

"No more than I was obliged to."

"Well, what did you hear?"

"I heard father and Mr. Angell quarrel over the possession of something which appeared to belong to father, and of which Mr. Angell had secured control."

"Yes."

"Mr. Angell refused to restore it."

"What reason did he give?"

"I could not hear that, for he always spoke in a whisper when he approached that subject."

"He seemed to apologize?"

"Yes; or to explain."

"What effect did this conduct have upon your father?"

"It made him very angry."

"Can you repeat any words you ever heard him use in this connection?"

"I heard him say, more than once during the last week of his life, that Mr. Angell seemed to regard him as a baby, or as a doddering old fool, unable to protect his own."

"And Angell? What was his reply?"

"He replied eagerly, earnestly, but always in whispers. Once I heard him say that he had some consideration for his affianced wife if her father had none for his own daughter."

"So the quarrel might have been about you, after all."

"I am sure it was not."

"But this talk looks like it."

Clara remained silent.

"Do you recall other words?"

"Oh, I heard father call him a thief, and a traitor, and a bad man, many, many times."

"Called him a thief?"

"Indeed he did."

"And you never secured an explanation?"

"No."

"And yet Angell was your affianced husband?"

"Yes."

"Doesn't that appear strange?"

"Under the circumstances, no."

"You never spoke to your father about what you had heard?"

"Oh, yes."

"Well?"

"He laughed it off and said it was not for me to bother about."

"Then you went to Mr. Angell?"

"Yes."

"And he refused to talk?"

"He promised to make an explanation, but he never did."

"So you were not good friends at the time of the murder?"

"That is putting it strongly."

"You have given him no opportunity to explain since the murder?"

"The time for him to explain was when father could have answered him. It is too late now."

"And you believe Angell guilty?"

"What else is there for me to think?"

Nick thought fast for a moment.

He had come upon a stone wall—a mental one harder to surmount than the real thing.

This girl's testimony, in connection with the introduction of the knife, would send Angell to the electric chair! There was no doubt about that.

He was thinking how hard and cold the girl was, how masculine a mind lay behind a fair feminine face, when the sound of a sob came to his ears. In his thought he had arisen and now stood with his back to the girl, gazing out of the window.

He turned quickly about to find Clara lying prone upon a couch, her face buried in her shaking hands, her whole body convulsed with emotion. He approached her with a word of sympathy.

"Don't talk to me," she said brokenly, and without lifting her face. "Remember what I have done, and what I must do, and leave me to my fate—the fate of a miserable woman whose duty calls her to take the life of the one man in the world she loves."

"You may see things differently in the morning," said Nick.

"I have tried to see them differently," was the reply. "I have tried to explain away the words I heard, but it is of no use. I must tell the truth. Go away now, please."

"I think I can show you good reasons why Angell could not have committed this awful crime," said Nick.

The girl looked up hopefully.

Had she been waiting for some ray of hope for the man she loved?

Nick explained about the knife-throwing and the marks on the tree discovered by Chick.

"Some one threw that knife," he said, "and some one practised long before taking the risk."

"It was Mr. Angell's knife?" asked Clara, the look of terror deepening in her blue eyes.

"I believe so, though that is not yet proven."

Clara's head sank to the sofa-pillow again.

"The boys of the neighborhood," she said, "have been using that tree for a mark for a long time. We all knew about the tree and the knife-throwers. There was an entertainment there some weeks ago, given by some strange jugglers from the far East, and the boys have been imitating their acts. It is a hopeless clue, Mr. Carter."

After a few words of consolation, Nick left the house.

He did not think clearly there.

The solid foundation had been knocked from beneath his feet.

Angell was the only one within reach of the murdered man at the time the crime was committed.

Angell's knife in the dead man's heart.

Angell's honesty attacked by the murdered man.

An open quarrel in public.

It seemed all up with the young newspaper man.

Nick went to his office and locked himself in. It was time for a show-down with himself. He was in a mood which demanded quiet thought and study.

First, who were the men who had trailed after Angell and himself on the way to the reporter's rooms?

Second, what had Angell taken away from the room that night?

Third, what had the murdered man and Angell quarreled about?

Fourth, what was the matter with Angell, anyway?

Nick could not answer these questions.

He did not believe that the Black Harry gang was the one which had followed Angell and finally captured him.

He was all at sea as to what Angell had removed from the room.

He believed what Clara Howard had told him regarding the strained relations existing between Angell and her father.

He also believed in Angell's innocence—otherwise he would have dropped the case.

The testimony of the girl would murder the young man. His seeming flight would help along in that direction.

If the young fellow could be found, he might be able to clear up the quarrel proposition.

Then Nick's thoughts began to run about in this way:

They quarreled about something of the professor's which Angell had secured control of and refused to give up. It is not a sure thing that the rooms were searched by Black Harry's crowd. Who, then?

Perhaps some agent of the professor!

Perhaps some one from whom the professor was withholding the thing in dispute, and who had discovered its location!

Perhaps Angell had withheld this mysterious thing from the professor for his own protection.

Perhaps the cloth bag so strangely taken away by Angell was that thing!

Perhaps, during the years of his foreign travel the professor had made an enemy or secured a relic which—

Nick sprang to his feet and almost shouted!

The mystery was solved!

His hour of show-down had been a profitable one.

Five minutes later this despatch went over the wire to Chick, at White Beach:

"How about Howard's rooms? Anything disturbed there before or since the murder? Look for conditions similar to those at Angell's rooms. Answer. Rush."

In an hour this answering despatch was received by the impatient detective:

"Howard's room thoroughly ransacked during the funeral hour. Loss cannot be estimated until the arrival of Miss Howard. Rush instructions."

Nick's instructions were contained in two words:

"Come home."

Chick would be wanted in New York at once. There was where the fight for Angell's life must be made.

For the first time since taking the case, Nick knew just what to do—just where to begin operations.

The story of the murder looked like a simple problem indeed, but there would be risk in showing all he knew to be the truth.

CHAPTER VIII.

CLOSING IN.

It was early evening when Nick left his study—a hot August night with only stars in the smoky sky and no wind coming in from the Sound. Beyond the North River, far over Jersey, low, threatening clouds were gathering. It looked like a storm before morning—one of those sharp electrical storms so common during the hot months.

Nick was made up as a plainsman. He looked for all the world as if he had just ridden in on a cattle train from the far West, had bulged his pockets with the price of the stock, and was about to take in the city.

But under the loose attire of the plainsman was a lighter summer costume which would make a gay young dude of him.

And he was armed to the teeth—armed with revolver, knife, and with drugs which would take life or consciousness temporarily.

The detective went sweltering down the street, seeming to be just a trifle tipsy. One man, apparently a country banker out for a lark, followed at no great distance.

Three more men were to meet him at stated points at stated hours during the night.

The detective believed that he had the game in his

hands, and he marshaled his men like buttons on a checker-board, and each moved according to general system.

Nick first went to the Twenty-third Street house where he had met Clara Howard. She, of course, did not recognize him, but was soon convinced of his identity.

"Now," said Nick, "I want to ask you a few questions regarding the jugglers who visited White Beach this season and gave knife-throwing exhibitions. How many were there in the party?"

"Three."

"And the person who actually did the knife feats?"

"Was a woman."

"Old or young?"

"Young, and—and—pretty."

"Yes, and your father went to their show?"

"Many times."

"And became acquainted with the performers?"

"After a time, yes. At first he seemed to want to keep away from them. I never knew him to change so suddenly."

"Exactly. And Angell was there, and saw the pretty knife-thrower, and paid some attention to her?"

"Why," with an angry blush, "I think he paid too much attention to the creature, being engaged to marry me."

"And the trouble began right there?"

"What trouble do you refer to?"

"The trouble between Angell and your father and the trouble between Angell and you."

"Shortly after that. Oh, I was not jealous, if that is what you mean."

"Of course not. And these jugglers were interested in the work your father was preparing—the work on the far East?"

"One was a very learned man, and he was interested."

"And your father talked their language?"

"How do you know all this?"

"I ask it as a question," said Nick. "Did your father converse with the traveling show people in their own language?"

"Yes."

The mystery attached to the White Beach murder was falling away.

Nick now regarded the work as finished—except the task of landing the person pointed out by circumstances as the murderer.

"Did you ever see your father in their company?" he continued.

"Never."

"When they left White Beach, was that the last of them?"

"I think they came back and hung about the place after their playing was discontinued."

"Did you go to their show?"

"No, indeed."

"Was it a good show?"

"People said that the knife-throwing was the only good feature."

Nick could have hugged himself.

"You do not think they were professionals?"

"I do not."

"Have you ever connected them with your father's death?"

"Why, no. They were miles away when poor father was murdered."

"But the knife-thrower?"

The girl rose slowly to her feet and stood before the detective like one in a trance.

"My God!" she cried, "I never thought of that! And I have been blaming Angell. I never thought of the knife-thrower. I never even recalled her presence at the place until you brought it all back to me with your questions. Why, the knife-thrower tried——"

The girl sank into her chair again and covered her face with her hands. Nick waited for her to go on, but she would say no more. The sentence remained unfinished for many hours.

The girl expressed no surprise when informed that the rooms occupied by her father and herself at White Beach had been looted. She declared that there was little of value there, and that it didn't matter.

Nick tried one more question.

"Have you ever known of your father giving anything of value into the keeping of Mr. Angell?"

Clara shook her head.

"Do you know of any jewels owned by your father which Angell was custodian of?"

The girl would not answer. She seemed like one in a dream. With her eyes fixed on vacancy, she sat staring straight ahead.

The notion that the pretty knife-thrower had committed the murder seemed to have paralyzed her mind.

Nick could not discover whether the brain was affected by horror or pity for the child-murderer.

He left the girl sitting there, fully realizing that the thing which had so suddenly cast a shadow on her brain would be of great use to him in his work on the case. But the girl would not talk, and there was the end of it. On the way out he notified the maid of the sudden illness of Miss Howard, and five minutes later was hustling down Second Avenue.

He paused at a little restaurant well down toward Grand Street and seated himself at a table in a corner.

As he did so the waiter approached, immaculate in white vest, apron, coat, and cap, and laid a great roll of theater programs and clippings from daily newspapers before him. Nick motioned to a chair and the waiter sat down.

"Have you located them?" Nick asked.

"They are not playing now," was the reply. "I guess two of the bunch never played before or since the White Beach engagement."

The waiter was Ten-Ichi. The owner of the restaurant was in Nick's pay, and many a day his staff consisted mostly of detectives, watching for clues which they believed to be in that part of the city.

"Where are they—the two older ones, I mean?"

"I think I have located them down on Grand Street. I have two men watching."

"And the girl, the knife-thrower?"

"She is not with them, but we know where she is. Do you want her?"

"It looks like the public executioner wanted her," said Nick.

"Impossible. Why, she's just a child."

"But she can throw a knife at sixty feet."

"I don't believe it."

"Well, we want her. Order me a steak, and I'll go out and get her presently."

"What was the motive?" asked the waiter.

"Oh, I guess she had little personal motive. Money." Again the waiter expressed disbelief.

"If she didn't do it," said Nick, "she can show where she was on the day the murder was committed."

"Of course she can. Why, Nick, I know that little girl. She's just a little fool who's stuck on the stage. She's not an East Indian at all. She'll tell me all there is to it."

"Go and get her," said Nick sharply, and the waiter threw off his white uniform and went away.

"Now," thought Nick, "I wonder if another clue is going to break in my hands? This case is a corker. I wonder how the boys are succeeding in the hunt for Angell?"

"From the way things are going in this matter, he is likely to walk in any minute and say he just took a stroll around the block."

In a short time the waiter came in with a pretty young girl of about seventeen. She was dark of complexion and her hair and eyes were black as jet. She was slender and with a pleasant face and very pretty eyes.

"This is the knife-thrower," said the waiter, putting his white suit on again. "Her name is Izola Ball."

Izola seated herself at the table, in response to a motion from Nick, blushing prettily.

She had not much to say. She knew little of what had been going on at White Beach. She had been taught a few phrases of some outlandish tongue, just enough to carry out the deception, but she had used the words only when necessary, and not always with a full understanding of their meaning.

Yes, she had met young Angell there, and he had paid some attention to her. He knew that she was a New York girl, and was always coaxing her to play spy on the East Indians, her employers. He said he wanted to find out what they were up to and make a sensation for his paper.

The girl talked perfectly frank.

Nick listened in amazement, but out of all the talk a slender idea was growing in his mind.

His working the White Beach murder case by the process of elimination seemed to be going on.

First, Black Harry had not been in the game.

Second, the knife-thrower was proving an alibi.

"To be short about it," said Nick, "where were you on the afternoon of Thursday, the day before yesterday?"

The girl bent her head a moment in thought. Nick noticed what a pretty dimple her cheek disclosed.

"Why," she said presently, "I was right in this place most of the afternoon. One of the girls left, and I came here to help Dick out."

The proprietor was called and confirmed the statement.

"Do you know where the East Indians were on that day?" was the next question.

"I know where they live, but I do not know whether they were at home that day."

"Do you see them often?"

"No; they are angry with me."

"Why?"

"Because I quit their old show."

"I see."

"It wasn't any good, and so I left. And one of them began to pester me with his attentions."

"Exactly. Which one?"

"The one I called Bah. He was just the servant of Pooh."

"Queer names."

"Oh, they are not their real names. Their native names are as long as a sailor's dream. I bunched them and named them, jointly, Poohbah, because they think they are 'it.'"

"Did you ever hear them talk of Professor Howard or Mr. Angell?"

"Bless you, no. I never heard them talk about anything that I could understand. That East Indian jargon is fierce."

"And Angell made love to you?"

"Where did you get that notion?"

"Why, you have confessed it."

"Nothing of the kind, Mr. Freshy. Angell wanted me to spy on the bosses and used flattery to win me over. That's all, but I guess the young woman was jealous. I saw her watching us when we walked together on the beach one day."

"What was done when you quit the show?"

"Why, they quit. They had no good stunts, and neither can throw a knife."

"How did you come to learn how?"

"I always could. Born in me, I guess."

"How do you know they cannot throw the knife?"

"I have seen them try."

"Where?"

"At a big tree in the thicket at White Beach."

"And they did not succeed in hitting the mark?"

"Not at all."

"Then who made the marks on that tree, and made them so close together?"

"I think I made a good many of them."

"Did they ever suggest that you throw the knife at some living object?"

"Yes, and I refused."

"I do not mean on the stage. I mean with murder in your heart."

The girl opened her pretty eyes in wonder.

"Certainly not," she said. "I am not a murderess. You needn't think, just because you are Nick Carter, that you can accuse me of killing the professor."

Nick quieted the angry girl, secured the address of the two East Indians, whispered a few words of instruction to the waiter, and went out.

It was now nearly midnight. The storm which had threatened the city in early evening was still growling, and flashing in the west, only a whirl of wind from down the coast seemed to be driving the black and lightning-lighted clouds to the north.

At a down-town corner Nick met the man who had been stationed there earlier in the evening by his orders. The man appeared like a plainsman, too. They both looked a little the worse for liquor.

Turning then to the west they proceeded south on the Bowery. At a side street running in the direction of Broadway they paused.

"That is the house," said Nick, pointing to a three-story structure facing north. There was an area stairway and long iron steps leading up to the first floor door. A red shield on the transom was illuminated by a gas-jet within. On the shield were the words:

"SECOND SIGHT."

"FORTUNES TOLD."

"You know what to do," said Nick to his assistant, and the next moment he was pushing the electric button at the door of the mysterious house, every window of which was dark. In fact there was no light about the place save the red glare at the transom, and that seemed to keep vigilant guard over the uncanny place like a malignant and watchful eye.

The assistant concealed himself in a near-by doorway and waited.

The person who admitted Nick to the house was a negro of unusual size. The muscle hung to his arms and neck like cords of rope, and his brutal chin was chucked forward like that of a vicious bulldog. He gave the detective a shrewd glance, saw the condition he assumed to be in, and grinned. They knew what to do with drunken men in that house.

Nick was not taken to the front parlor, where visitors

were usually received, but escorted to a little back room, facing a court.

There, with a surly statement that some one would be with him in a minute, the giant left him and returned to his watch at the door.

The room was hung in cheap red, with trimmings of cheaper gilt. The ceiling was canopied in red and gilt, like the roof of a tent. A subtle odor of burning drugs came to the detective. Soft, slow music pattered on the heavy air. There was a drowsy look to the very gaslight, which burned low and flickered as if half-asleep.

Before he sat down Nick took in every detail of the place at one quick glance. On the red carpet was a white mark in quarter-circle form, running from the castor of a heavy lounge, showing that the article was often swung away from the wall against which it stood.

"There is either a trap-door there or a secret door in the wall," thought Nick. The red hanging above swayed in the air, and Nick glanced up without seeming to do so.

"There is also a secret trap up there," he thought, "and some one is watching me from the hangings."

CHAPTER IX.

THE PRINCE'S NECKLACE.

He yawned heavily, threw out his arms aimlessly, and sank into a chair, apparently half-dazed with liquor and overcome with the atmosphere of the place.

But his eyes were not entirely closed. Within their range was a round center-table.

On that center-table was a bag made of strong cloth.

It was the bag Angell had taken from its hiding-place at his rooms and concealed in an inner pocket!

So Angell was there, or had been there!

The slender idea in his brain sprang to full life and strength.

The process of elimination had worked wonder.

The East Indians had searched Angell's rooms. They had found the knife, but they had not discovered the coarse cloth bag and its contents. They had followed him to White Beach, thinking that he might have carried it with him.

But the murder?

Why had that been committed?

Had the professor—

Nick almost sprang to his feet in the excitement of the moment.

Angell and the professor had quarreled over the possession of some valuable thing which the reporter refused to restore, saying that it was for the professor's own good he was acting!

The professor had recently returned from India. Who knows that he had not brought with him something for which a native might trail him over the earth, to stick a knife into his heart at last!

Even after the murder the professor's rooms at the hotel had been looted, and then the trail had dropped back to Angell in New York.

In fact, the East Indians, or some of their spies, had undoubtedly followed Angell and the officer down on the train.

It was they who had captured him.

He had been forced to return to his room while under the influence of a drug and look for the cloth bag.

The person at the door had held him well in control during his search of the rooms, and had gotten him away safely in the darkness and the melee which had followed.

Well, whether he landed the murderer or not, he was sure to find the young reporter in the house—provided he had not been murdered.

Then a daring thought flashed into his mind. How to get a word to his down-town office, where half-a-dozen men were waiting!

He staggered from his chair and threw himself against the door. It was locked, but the negro's face appeared in a slight opening in a moment.

"Wanst t' go t' bed," he muttered.

"Go chase yerself," said the negro insolently. "This ain't no bed-house."

There was a soft rustle of silken skirts, and a slender, dark-eyed woman of middle age entered the room.

"What is it?" she asked pleasantly.

"He wants to go to bed!" said the negro, with a scowl. "I'd put him to sleep if I had my way."

"Tel'phone first," muttered Nick. "Wife waitin'."

"Pshaw," said the woman, "let him telephone, and put him on the lounge in there to sleep his whisky off."

The telephone was in a tiny closet just off the main hall, and the negro followed Nick to it, pretending to steady his steps, for to the person unacquainted with the true facts in the case Nick was becoming drunker every moment.

Nick rang up his office, which was down in the block as a bachelor apartment, and got a quick response. The negro listened, but he heard only the maudlin explanations of a drunken man, saying that he was out in the country and would be home in the morning.

Yet in the talk to which the negro listened was a complete description of the place and definite orders what to do. How well those orders were obeyed will be seen later.

Then Nick, seemingly drunker than ever, went back to the rear room and threw himself down on the couch. In a moment he seemed to be fast asleep. The negro bent over him and slid his hand carefully over each exposed pocket.

Taking money from a drunken man seemed easy. Nick was tempted to tip him over with one quick blow, but he realized that such a course would spoil his plans for the night, and only swung his arms out and muttered.

Resolving to return to his prey later on, after he was dead to the world, the negro left the room.

Then there came a slight scraping, as of the sliding of metal on metal. A little gust of cool air struck the detective's face, on the side next to the wall.

The couch slid away, then back, and through an opening in the wall of the room. Then a panel shot down and Nick found himself in a narrow, closetlike place, probably two yards in width, but very long. In fact, it seemed to reach from front to back, a secret passage connecting with every room on that floor and with upper rooms by means of a spiral ladder of iron. Once the place had been a long hallway.

Nick lay perfectly still, apparently asleep, but his eyes were busy. There was a dim light in the place, coming from the ceiling and heavily shaded. The odor of drugs was stronger here.

Away off at the rear was a screen, an eryl thing, with impossible birds and reptiles, drawn in all the colors of the rainbow, sporting about in quaint postures. A faint movement there told Nick that he was being watched from that point.

This person must be disposed of, for the detective had work to do.

If he was to find Angell in that witch-haunted labyrinth, he must have clear sailing. He rolled heavily to the floor, groaning as if hurt by the fall.

In a moment, a burly brute of a negro, seemingly the

counterpart of the one at the door, approached him. His evil eyes were fastened with a deadly malignancy upon Nick's face. His muscles twitched in his wide sleeves, as if trembling to attack an unconscious and seemingly unarmed man.

"W'y fo' you-all make dis trubble?"

The brute drew back his foot to kick Nick in the face as he spoke.

Quicker than the negro could even think, Nick was on his feet and the brute went down under a blow that was delivered, with nothing to break its force, square under the ear.

It would have felled a horse, and the ruffian lay like one dead, not even groaning as he settled back on the floor.

Nick knew that he was safe from observation for some time at least, and was quickly out of his plainsman disguise. It was too hot in there for such a rig, and, then, it had served its purpose.

Nick now appeared in a swell summer costume, looking like a gay young New Yorker out for a good time and with plenty of money to pay for it. He had no means of removing the whisky flush he had painted on his face early in the evening, but this did not show to disadvantage in the new part.

He doped the negro good and plenty from a bottle taken from his discarded suit and then advanced to the front end of the long secret rooms. Just as he supposed, there was a secret panel opening into the front parlor and a peck-hole. He drew aside the hangings and looked through.

There were two persons in the room. Both were apparently East Indians, and both were evil and repulsive in aspect. They had eyes like snakes, and when they moved about one involuntarily thought of the motion of the serpent in the long grass of the jungle. They were clad in long robes which fell from neck to feet, and were here and there ornamented with gold and jewels arranged in weird designs. Upon their heads were the typical turbans of the East. They had evidently just come from some mummary with a person who had paid well for a glance into the future!

One of the men, who seemed rather the more dignified of the two, and had every appearance of being the master of the house, placed his hand in his bosom as Nick looked, and brought forth what seemed to be a handful of glittering, moving, flashing fire, the separate pieces and

coals of which were attached to an invisible cord. He poured the sparkling things back and forth from hand to hand, a greedy light in his evil eyes.

"The prince's diamond necklace," he muttered in excellent English. "Rescued from the infidel thief after many weary years, and after long journeys over land and sea! Great shall be the reward in our own land!"

"The ninth rescue!" said the other, in a tone which was almost a chant. "It shall dwell with the prince forever. Nine times hath it been taken from him by stealth. Nine times hath it been restored, with the blood of the thief as a peace-offering!"

Nick listened in amazement. Before him, coiling about the dusky fingers of the East Indian, was the glittering toy which had done Professor Howard to his death!

He saw the whole story of the costly trinket. The professor had by some means secured it and got it out of India. For purposes of greater security, it had been given to Angell to secrete in his rooms. They had quarreled over its restoration. The rooms had been looted, the knife found, but not the necklace. The professor had been murdered and Angell captured.

Such stones are often more deadly to their possessor than the most virulent poison. No wonder the emissaries of the prince had followed the glittering things over continents and over seas!

The peaceful possession of the diamonds in the hands of the self-confessed murderers indicated that Angell was now in greater danger than ever. By some strange influence, drug or spell, he had been forced to reveal the hiding-place of the diamonds and bring them away. Nick now understood the strange actions of the young man while in the room. The murderers would have no further use for Angell.

The detective had arrived none too soon, for there were the murderers to arrest and Angell to find. Nick thought he knew of a way.

The piece was staged, the actors were ready, and the strangest drama ever put on in criminal work was about to begin. The curtain was ready for the bell of the prompter. Nick looked at his watch. One o'clock, the hour set for the performance to begin!

A quick ring came from the electric bell at the door. In the hush which followed, Nick heard the giant negro shuffling through the hall to admit the caller. He even heard the day-chain fall back and the key turn in the lock.

Then there came a cry, a hoarse cry of fright and wonder combined.

The negro seemed to be incapable of making an articulate sound. It was an awful noise that came from his lips. The East Indian concealed the diamonds in his breast and sprang to the door, his companion following. When the door opened, Nick saw the giant lying on the floor of the hall. Above him stood the assistant, dressed in exact imitation of the man the negro believed to be lying unconscious in the secret room.

He thought he was seeing a ghost! His employers, too, were dazed for an instant. The assistant, walking stiffly, brushed past the East Indian into the front parlor. In the confusion Nick found opportunity to whisper one word: "Here!"

The assistant heard and approached the couch which stood before the secret panel. His ear was now within a few inches of Nick's face. The Indians were calming the negro, who insisted on leaving the house at once. But he knew too much to be permitted to depart.

For an instant they both bent over him, with their backs turned to the parlor. In that instant Nick touched the button controlling the panel and pulled his assistant heels-over-head back into the secret room.

CHAPTER X.

CONCLUSION.

When the East Indians at last succeeded in calming the fears of the negro, they turned back to the parlor to find it empty. And yet they had seen the plainsman enter there not a minute before.

The negro also saw what had taken place, and he thought the plainsman had died of the vapor thrown into the secret room and that it was only his ghost which had entered at the front door.

With a cry which rang through the house he fell back in a faint. Superstition is a leading characteristic of his race, but this giant was doubly afraid of the dead, although more than one murder might have been traced to his brutal hand.

But the Indian who had shown the diamonds seemed to understand. He fixed his keen eyes on the wall back of the couch and pointed. There was no excitement in his manner. To his mind no person who penetrated the mysteries of the house could or should escape. It would be only one more murder.

He touched a button at the door and a bell rang sharply in a distant apartment. In an instant half a-dozen muscular East Indians made their appearance. They were silent, watchful, ready for any deed of cruelty and violence.

The master pointed toward the wall, and they moved forward.

"We are in for it now," whispered Nick's assistant.

"Wait," said the detective. "The next act will be on in a second."

As he spoke the door-bell rang again, echoing through the hushed rooms like a funeral knell.

The negro being out of the game, one of the Indians went to the door and opened it. The figure which confronted him was enveloped in a long cloak which fell from the crown of the head to the feet. An uncomfortable costume for a hot night, but necessary for only a short time. The cloak was such as the East Indians wore when abroad.

It kept up the idea of mysticism in the part of the city where they resided, and brought money from the credulous. The costume was well known to the police.

One of the inmates of the house was abroad that night, and so the figure in the doorway was not denied admission. Once inside, the cloak was dropped.

The assistant standing by Nick's side gasped. He was more than amazed. Angell stood there.

Or, if it was not Angell, it was a perfect representation of him.

Indeed, it was the representation which had deceived the White Beach officer and the chief of police. It was Patsy, and Nick had ordered this game while at the telephone.

In that house of mystery and secret passages, he knew that it would be impossible to find the spot where Angell was hidden. Indeed, it was certain that the young man would be murdered if an open raid was made.

Now came the crucial time. Would the East Indians believe that Angell had in some manner escaped, and gained the street? Would they then believe that he had wandered back while in a dazed condition?

The next moment would show.

If the Indians believed this, they would hustle Patsy back to the place where Angell was confined, thinking to incarcerate the young man in his old prison. This would point the way.

It was a cunning plot, and Nick prided himself on it.

The assistant, who did not know what was going on, not having been communicated with since Angell's presence in the house had been made clear by the discovery of the cloth bag, seized Nick by the arm.

"Now is the time to get him," he said.

"Wait," whispered Nick. "The third act is ready for the prompter's bell. Listen."

The master was giving directions in his own tongue, but Nick understood that he was ordering the pretending Angell back to his place of confinement.

Closely followed by his assistant, Nick moved swiftly toward the rear of the long hallway, now a secret passage of communication. The guards might pass through the rear door with their prisoner, and the drugged negro must be gotten out of the way.

This was the work of an instant, but it was accomplished none too quickly. In a second, the panel connecting with the rear room slid aside, and the prisoner entered, guarded by two attendants, villainous-looking brutes, who would murder at the will of their master.

Down the long hallway they went, then to the left, and down a staircase which had once furnished communication between the basement kitchen of the house and the cellar.

The old cellar was an evil-smelling place, dim and damp. At the rear the attendants came to a heavy door, which gave entrance to what had once been a vegetable cellar. This was locked, evidently much to the amazement of the guards, for they whispered in their native language as they fumbled about for the key.

Nick chuckled.

"They are wondering how Angell came to lock the door after he got out," he said. "See them look at Patsy. They think he is Angell, all right enough!"

Just as the door opened, the place was flooded with electric light.

In the strong light the attendants saw the real Angell spring to his feet, and advance toward this other Angell, the man they had believed to be the escaped prisoner.

They saw the trick in an instant—saw that they had led a stranger straight to their prisoner. Then they discovered the detectives advancing upon them, and sprang forward to close the door.

But they were too late. They both went down under heavy blows, and lay unconscious upon the floor.

Angell picked up the bunch of keys, dragged the men

into the old cellar, which had been his place of confinement since his capture by the "fainting-man" trick on Third Avenue, and closed and locked the heavy door. Then he turned to Nick.

"I had an idea you would get here," he said, "though for the life of me, I could not see how."

"I didn't know myself for a long time," said Nick. "You understand the murder mystery now?"

"Oh, I thought it was the East Indians from the start," said the young man, "but I could not open my lips without imperiling Clara's possession of the diamonds. Then, I thought you would be able to clear things up."

"Does Clara know about the diamonds?"

"Certainly not. Her father wanted them given to her after his death, if he died first. They were all he could leave her."

"How did he come possessed of the diamonds?"

"Invested the savings of a life in them while in India."

"But they are known as the prince's diamonds."

"Oh, they have a way of selling diamonds over there, and then getting them back by the murder method."

"You think this is the case here?"

"I am certain of it."

"Why were the diamonds in your room?"

"I thought them safer there than in the possession of the professor. I wanted them placed in a deposit vault, but he would not consent. We often quarreled about the disposition of the jewels. That's what got me into this trouble."

"And the East Indians have the diamonds now?" asked Tom.

"They got me to dig them up at the rooms," said Angell. "That was a trip to dreamland, all right. I just remember going there, drawn by some mesmeric influence, I presume. Then there was a row about something, and we cut for it."

"Why didn't the Indian go into the room with you?" asked Nick.

"Because he saw that the room was watched from a hole in the ceiling," replied Angell. "Cute chap, that old mug. Izola called him Poo, because he seemed to be it, and is wise to everything."

"Then that is how they came to attack me," said Nick. "One of the cutthroats ascended the stairs, and waited for me to leave the room. That was a close call."

"I think," said Patsy, "that you would better get into a brighter and drier place to talk. It feels like a cemetery

down here. Did you say that the Indians have regained the diamonds?"

"They have them yet for all I know," said Angell.

"Then let us go and get up a mix-up that will change title," said Patsy. "I've been loafing at the Tombs so long that I want to start something invigorating."

"Wait," said Nick. "There's a fourth act to this drama. It is about time for the last scene. Listen."

The detectives, after conferring about nine hours of solid sleep on the two attendants by means of the drug used on the negro, went to the foot of the staircase, and listened.

Faintly, through the distance, they heard the tinkle of a bell.

"There is an alarm at the door," said Nick, "and they are calling these two attendants up-stairs."

In a moment there came the sound of heavy blows.

"That's bad," said Nick. "Chick and his boys have been forced to break in the door. Listen, and you'll hear the Indians making for this hiding-place."

The four men crept into a shadowy corner, leaving the light on in full. Several soft, quick knocks came from the head of the stairs.

"Now, what do they want?" asked Nick. "Something, and they want it quick."

He arose, and turned out the light, leaving the place black as night.

Then the door opened, and stealthy footfalls were heard on the stairs. Farther away came the heavy tread of the police officers.

"That's it," said Nick, "they wanted the light out, fearing that the shaft from the opening door might attract the officers to the hiding-place. Now for it."

The two leaders and four attendants were now in the dark cellar leading to the place where Angell had been confined. As Nick heard them moving along, he could not help wondering if the man called Poo still held the diamonds in his greedy fingers.

"Lucky I dragged those niggers into the back room," said Angell. "Otherwise, these dark beauties might fall over them."

In a moment the detectives heard the heavy boots of the policemen on the stairs. Then they heard the door to the dungeon close.

"Any secret way out of there?" asked Nick.

"Not that I know of," was Angell's reply, "and I looked for one right industriously."

Nick gave a call which Chick would understand, and turned up the light. The front cellar and passage was full of uniformed officers, with Chick in the lead. He had not known what conditions would be found at the home of the East Indians, and had ordered enough men to tear the structure down, from cellar to attic, if necessary.

He could take no chances on losing Angell by murder.

"Where are they?" asked Chick.

Nick pointed to the closed door.

"There may be a way out," suggested Chick. "They have lived here long enough to have the whole block mined. These East Indians burrow like rabbits."

"I can stop that," said Nick. "The man who murdered Professor Howard is in there, and he must not escape."

In a second Nick was at work on the door with a small drill, and in another second he had a hole through it.

"There," he said. "I can put vapor enough through that little hole to put them all to sleep."

And this is what he did, and this is how they came to be found on the floor of the dungeon. They were not killed by the vapor sent into the room by the detective. Feeling the drug creeping through their bodies, and knowing that it meant helplessness and capture, they all died by poison administered by Poo.

Hidden in his turban they found the diamonds—hundreds of thousands of dollars' worth of them, and they served to make life tolerably easy for Mr. and Mrs. Angell.

On the way out of the house the detectives captured the East Indian who had been abroad during the troublous times, and his confession made Angell's release certain.

Indeed, the confession of the three men made the story of the Howard murder read like a romance when reduced to writing in the diary of the detective.

Tracing the prince's diamonds across the ocean, the East Indians had located them at last in Angell's possession, where they had been placed by the professor for greater security.

They had searched his rooms, with the connivance of the custodian, who had permitted them to enter by the use of her keys, but had not found the diamonds. Then they had followed the professor and Angell to White Beach, where they had given the shows in order to attract the attention of the professor.

The girl Izola had taught the Indian called Poo the art

of knife-throwing, and it was he who had committed the murder, throwing the knife found in Angell's rooms. The balloon ascension and explosion had been carefully arranged just before the murder to attract attention from the piazza.

The diamonds had more than once been demanded of the professor, but the demand had been refused, even when he knew that his refusal might mean death. He wanted Angell to give up the gems because he feared that the Indians would murder him.

It was a thrilling story of cunning, and patient watching, and waiting, and the newspapers made much of it, and Nick Carter received a full measure of praise for his splendid work on the case.

Nick kept his word, and in due time convicted Black Harry of the murder of which Angell held the proof.

"I'd like to know," said Angell, a few days later, "how you came to jump at the Indian clue the instant the knife-throwing was mentioned. East Indians are not the only ones who throw knives."

"Why," said Nick, "the whole case was as easy as adding two and two from that time on. The day I searched your rooms I found a pellet of pure native opium on one of the chairs. No one but an East Indian would have that in this country. I puzzled over it at first, but the first word of the show at White Beach set the whole slow fire in my brain to blazing brightly. It was all off then."

"And you think the woman let the Indians into my rooms?"

"I am sure of it. She admitted as much when she lied, and stated an impossible condition of affairs. And she got well paid for it, too, I have no doubt."

"But she brought Bart there for the same purpose."

"Oh, yes, but I was to blame for that," and Nick explained about the black pocketbook bait.

"And it is up to me for the suppers," said Angell, "for the knife was not at my rooms, and was at White Beach."

"And during the suppers," said Nick, "we'll talk over a way of getting Black Harry."

"And discuss a few wedding guests," said Angell.

"So Clara has relented?"

"Of course, and Izola is to be one of the bridesmaids."

"Be careful how she shows the diamonds," said Nick.

"I can't help thinking that, in some manner, the six dead East Indians and the three who are wearing their lives away at Sing Sing will be avenged."

"I hope there will be no more knife-throwing."

"It may be in a meaner way," said Nick. "This case was a simple one to that which may follow if word of all this disaster to the prince's men gets back to India."

"I am not afraid."

"Well," said Nick, "don't forget that Patsy has something coming. You know he stood a murder charge for you."

"He shall have a gold watch," said Angell gratefully. "And, as for you, I'm going to write up this four-act drama, and play you up in it."

And he did.

THE END.

The next number of the NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY, No. 480, will be "The Tong of the Tailless Dragon; or, Nick Carter's Close Shave," to be issued next week.

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